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OBEDIENCE.

BY HENRY BEVERIDGE, ESQ.

II. COMPULSORY OBEDIENCE.

ETYMOLOGICALLY obedience signifies careful listening; its meaning in ordinary use may be simply defined as, Doing what we are told, or more accurately as, Conscious, active, conformity to the expressed will or command of another.

We will begin our inquiry into the proper place of obedience in family life, by first examining the position it occupies in other societies. On board ship we find a markedly artificial society, where prompt obedience—involving not only the proper conduct of the voyage, but also the safety of the ship, and the lives of all on board is of absolute necessity; the law confers on the captain accordingly extraordinary powers of enforcing obedience—authorising even, under certain circumstances, the infliction of death. In the army, also, life and death for all equally depend upon obedience. The social relation of master and servant is again a highly artificial one; in this case the servant contracts for certain wages to obey, within limits, the orders of his master: obedience withheld, the contract terminates, and the servant is dismissed. Again in all civil institutions, obedience to the law of the land must either be yielded willingly by the citizens, or else, in the last resort, be exacted by force. The same is the case in the school.

In all these instances, it will be noted there is physical compulsion at the back of obedience, as an ultimate resource. It will also be noted, however, that just in proportion as any community is orderly and well governed, so, in like measure is compulsion less frequently employed.

In contrast to the conventional origin of obedience in the societies already examined, there is in the family a strictly natural necessity for obedience. Upon the parent there devolves a strictly natural responsibility for the child. If left

to himself the child would perish by starvation, exposure or accident. The infant is necessarily helpless, and, in the matter of providing for his own essential requirements entirely passive. Thus in an accurate sense the child lies at the mercy of his parents; his life or death is entirely in their hands. So far then free action, consciously willing action has not yet been aroused; the child submits to the parental will, as the sapling bends before the breeze; he submits to necessity, and thus far the opportunity for obedience—which according to our definition essentially implies a conscious and active submission to authority—has not yet arisen. As by “the law is the knowledge of sin,” so it is only with the entering in of command that the problem of obedience can be said to emerge; but once given the command and it is open to the child to choose—to obey or to disobey.

As yet the child has developed no fear of his parent—unless (as, alas, sometimes occurs) the parent has already punished him for acts performed in innocence of offence—his obedience, therefore, cannot have the motive of fear. Why then should the child obey? The answer to this question is not obvious; the question is, however, of very fundamental importance, for upon the nature of the reply must depend our whole attitude in regard to the function of obedience in education.

At this point then it is fitting that the parent should weigh the responsibilities of his position, that he should pause and carefully consider lest by one thoughtless word, one unnecessary command, it should be his part of all others to tempt his child to taste of the forbidden fruit; to the first lapse from love; to the first defect from trust; to the first act of disobedience by which the child of his love shall be banished for ever from the pleasant glades of that garden of innocence unveiled—the heritage of the children—from which our first parents were cast out, and whence we too, alas, have already been driven forth.

This question, Why should the child obey? involves several inquiries, and of these let us first consider what is the true nature of the relation that exists between parent and child with respect to obedience.

The traditional view of the parental relation is based upon the Roman law of *Patria Potestas*, according to which the

parent possesses a right of property in his child, a divine right to exercise authority over him, a right and privilege which death alone can end. To a large extent this view has been departed from in the present day, but undoubtedly it is not yet entirely extinct. In the modified form in which it has come down to us, it may be stated thus: There is a right in the father to command the obedience of the child, and further a right of punishment in order to enforce this obedience. Does this express, however, anything like an accurate view of the facts? Would it not be much nearer the truth to say that the parent in reality possesses no rights in the child; that what he does indeed possess are duties and responsibilities towards it. That in point of fact there rather rests upon him the responsibility, the burden, the duty, of claiming obedience for the good of the child, and again it may be of enforcing this claim by means of punishment.

Having so far considered the parental relation towards obedience, let us at this point turn our attention aside for a little from the direct path in order to consider obedience under a broader aspect than that which has hitherto been before us; and to this end let us substitute for the definition of obedience with which we started a new definition, viz. Obedience is conscious active submission to authority. This definition, which indeed is simply the old one generalised and cleared of its qualifications will be found to cover completely the whole sources of human activity, while under the previous and narrower definition—which corresponds, as we have seen to the common use of the word obedience—only a very limited portion of these sources was comprehended.

The forces at the back of all conscious human activity, the authorities to which obedience is rendered, may be classified under two heads: objective forces, those acting from without, and subjective forces, those acting from within. The former, the forces of environment may be regarded as the product of outward compulsion; and the latter, the forces arising from the inner nature of the individual, may be regarded as, in a true sense, the product of conscious freedom.

In the conduct of parental education then, between the motives of external compulsion and inner freedom, a choice is set before us, which alternative shall we prefer? Which represents the ideal aim to be set before us in the training of

our children—who, in truth, are not our children only, but indeed, the offspring of God, created in His own image, in whose nostrils He has breathed the breath of life, and to whom He has entrusted His own most God-like function, the power of causality—the freedom to will? Between the two alternatives thus set before us, it is clear that our decision cannot be doubtful. Our aim, by whatever methods followed, must perforce be the moral activity of the freely willing mind.

Here, however, we must distinguish: what is commonly called free action may arise from several distinct sources: first it may arise through the motive force of intuitive impulse—what we have already called natural predisposition. It is needless to say that action thus motivated cannot without large qualifications—since here the element of choice is absent—be considered in the full sense free. Yet, from another point of view, such actions may reasonably be termed free in the sense of being freely generated from within the organism and not compulsorily imposed from without. In like manner, habit, when once formed, even by compulsory external influence, may in the same sense be considered as a motive power giving rise to free action. Will itself, however, is the only motive power that can, with full propriety, be denominated free. But here again, as we have already seen, will has the power of creating habit, which, however, in this case also, even though formed freely by the will, in so far as it is habit, cannot properly be regarded as fully free. But the function in which will pre-eminently shews its freedom, is in the active selection of ends, and it is the exercise of this power alone, that we can rightly designate as free will in its full sense.

But here, once more, not every exercise of the power of active selection can be rightly called free. Only when the will decides for itself freely, that is rationally and in accordance with the real relations of things, the real laws of the universe, choosing the true good, and rejecting the evil—the false good—and not merely as the blind slave of unrational impulse and passion; only when it rejects the bondage of things of sense, and follows with a steady eye no other than those things which are consonant with its own high rational and spiritual nature, can it rightly be called free will and said truly to make its own unbiassed choice.

Again, the sense of the word Moral has need of definition. Morality, etymologically considered, means simply custom, and custom, as already pointed out, is the exact equivalent in the community of habit in the individual. But the words moral and morality are used not only in this low and literal sense, but also frequently in a higher sense, their use is therefore equivocal. There is first a morality the mere unintelligent fruit of custom, habit, respectability; and there is also the morality which expresses the highest habitual activity of the rational intellect, which is none other, indeed, than the manifestation of that law that shall be "written in the heart and in the mind." This morality may, perhaps be best distinguished as that of the transcendental reason. Again to define: morality finds a correlative in duty. Duty is simply the command laid down by morality upon either of its several planes: first, the duty of custom or tradition, that which is demanded by society; second, the duty of instinct, that which is suggested by natural impulse; and thirdly, rational duty, that which the transcendental reason proclaims.

The motives of self-conscious action then, the authorities to which we submit our activities, to which we render obedience, form a hierarchy and may be arranged in tabular form thus:—

MOTIVES OF HUMAN OR SELF-CONSCIOUS ACTION.

COMPULSORY. (Objective).	PHYSICAL LAW.	Thou Must.
	Necessity Absolute. Do. Partial.	
	POSITIVE LAW.	
	Compulsory Obedience.	Thou Shalt.
WILLING (Subjective.)	IMPULSE, PASSION, AFFECTION.	I Desire.
	Willing Obedience.	
	CUSTOM, MORALITY, DUTY.	I Ought.
	Habitual Obedience.	
	TRANSCENDENTAL REASON.	I Must.
	Free Will.	

If obedience in the broad sense represents the one motive power of all human action, then necessity and free will may rightly be regarded as polar aspects of obedience, to which in the one case compulsory obedience, and in the other case

willing and habitual obedience seem to attach themselves. Compulsory obedience is thus simply a less absolute form of necessity and willing and habitual obedience a less absolute form of free will.

The distinction between the motive stimulus exerted by physical compulsion and that derived from the moral freedom of will is of fundamental importance to the educator. Physical necessity, resting as it does on physical law, is consistent and invariable. It may indeed be resisted and disregarded, but not with impunity. Physical necessity may thus well be viewed as a kind of contract or bargain imposed from above, whose terms will read: The law may be broken, but at a certain cost. Thus no irritation is aroused by the penalties of physical law, its action is consistent, impersonal, automatic. All positive law—all obedience sanctioned by objective reward or punishment—in reality falls under this category: it is a form of physical compulsion. Necessity and freedom are polar motives to action and must necessarily exclude each other. Thus it appears that compulsory physical and free moral motive cannot at the same time exist together in the same action, if the motive be compulsory it cannot also be free, and if free it cannot be compulsory; though either motive, working separately, might easily give rise to quite the same outward result. It follows thus, that threat or punishment can never directly result in willing or moral obedience, but only in compulsory or physical obedience; compulsory and willing obedience are then marked off from each other with the utmost distinctness, and must therefore, by the necessity of the case be considered apart.

In the consideration of compulsory obedience, the most important factor that presents itself is the punishment or penalty by which it is sanctioned; we will therefore at this point examine shortly the moral effects which result from the use of punishment as a method of securing obedience.

The first punishment of the young child can hardly fail to stir in the parent's heart a sense of ruth for the unsympathetic rudeness which has thus ignorantly rushed in to intermeddle with the mysteries, beautiful and delicate, that lie deep hidden in the nature of the child. The storm cloud has burst; the rain drops have fallen; calm follows. The cloud

curtains are withdrawn from the face of the sky, and the child overflows with a chastened sense of dependence and submission—the summer shower is over, and he quiets himself peacefully in the dewy, evening sunshine. Such is the drama. But this experience can be but a rare one; by frequent repetition the child's nature can only be perverted and repressed, and as he grows older, not chastening and submissive, but hardening and unchildlike judgment ensues.

The effect of punishment varies greatly according to the penalty exacted, the method of its employment, and also according to the moral constitution of the child. We may, however, distinguish two typical courses through which the virus of punishment may work itself out. In one of these types we note, first resentment, then hatred, and finally rebellion. In the other type, we have first fear, then grief, then submission; after that searching of heart which works itself out ultimately in two directions: on the one hand, in a sense of injury and injustice suffered; and on the other, in a sense of contrition and a recognition of the righteousness of the penalty inflicted. It is this latter result, alone, that we can desire to produce upon the heart of the child; and in order to secure it, the adaptation of the punishment to the requirements of the case, cannot be too carefully considered. To the parent, who though fallible and erring, is yet earnest and diffident, it should, however, in his often disappointment and unsuccess, be a consolation to reflect that the child through the adaptability of the vital powers with which he is naturally endowed, is able to a very large degree to resist and throw off the evil consequences of much ignorant, ill-advised and even cruel treatment. Such treatment, however, can hardly have place without leaving behind a residue of serious injury, both physical and moral.

To sum up this section of our subject: in the course of our enquiry, we have ascertained the natural necessity of compulsion in the training of our children. We have also examined the conditions of compulsory obedience, and the moral effects of command, and of punishment its necessary sanction. The following practical conclusions suggest themselves;—let all commands given be carefully considered, and that specially in regard to the effect they are calculated to produce upon the formation of habit; for, let it be noted,

every command given is a definite step taken in the formation of a particular habit or otherwise in the destruction of some habit or natural impulse. For the purpose of the orderly and rapid formation of habit, it will be wise, carefully to restrict the subjects upon which commands shall be given at any one time; and at the same time, carefully to ensure that they shall be consistently enforced; for in this manner the acquiescence and attention of the child may be readily secured, and at the same time any particular habit may be formed rapidly and easily, and the way again cleared for new habits being formed successively. A ceaseless running fire of orders or commands is obviously to be avoided, for in seeking by this method to produce "prompt obedience," we shall probably only succeed in extinguishing initiative, or on the other hand in producing overt disobedience or hypocritical subservience, instead of the honour which should be the parents' due. Again the nearer the obedience exacted approximates to the characteristic and impersonal methods which operate in natural physical law; the more its sanctions are treated as distinctly physical consequences of physical transgressions—sheer natural justice—and at the moment of enforcement kept free from any admixture of moral considerations—save perhaps some expression of sorrow and sympathy on the part of the parent—the more safe and the more valuable will it be as an instrument of moral training. For although compulsory obedience is certainly in itself non-moral, yet it may be used, and should be used—though as far as possible confined to the very earliest years of the child, and more and more sparingly employed as his age increases—with the moral aim already set before us: the calling forth of a reasonable and willing (ultimately a morally imperative and transcendental) acceptance and submission to the righteous law of the universe.